



Al-Risala 1988

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2 November 1988

Editorial

The demise of General Muhammad Ziaul Haq in an air crash on August 17, 1988, has given rise to much speculation on the immediate fate of Pakistan, over which he ruled as President for eleven years. But the Times of India editorial of August 18, "Pakistan Without Zia" caused me to think of quite the reverse: "Zia Without Pakistan."

His journey, which began in this world, led him, for reasons which are still to be determined, straight to the world of the Hereafter. If we accept this as the total reality, we must immediately concede that, in terms of ultimate destiny, this fatality was of much greater and more profound significance for Zia than for Pakistan. True, Pakistan was the terrain which had nurtured and supported the ascendancy of Zia until the moment of his death, but what would it avail him even to think of his country while on his way to the divine court?

All men who aspire to positions of eminence are like Zia in that they are nurtured and supported by some 'Pakistan' or the other, whether it be a country, an institution, or an office. All too often this nurturing ground is marred by negative features such as expediency, falsehood and deception. But whatever the virtues or vices of the ground on which a man stands, it is his lifeline to success.

Ultimately, however, death separates all men from the ground on which they stand. Everyone has his "August 17" just as Zia had. At the preordained moment, the angel of death snatches man from the land, sea, or air, and carries him irrevocably away from the milieu which fostered his success. He then sets him down in a state of utter helplessness, without any of the moral or physical support of his earthly surroundings, in the celestial Court of the Almighty. For the deceased person, the Day of Reckoning has finally come.

Death is commonly described as a tragic end. Given the reality of the situation, it would be more fitting to describe it as a tragic beginning.

The Power of Islamic Thought

*"We will show them our signs
in all the regions of the earth
and in their own souls, until
they clearly see that this is
the truth. Does it not suffice
that your Lord is watching over
all things?" (Quran, 41:53)*

This verse from the *surah*, entitled *ha-mim as-Sajdah*, (Revelations Well Expounded) tells us that a time will come when the signs which appear in the world of nature will be all that is necessary to make clear the truth. That is to say that man's knowledge of himself and the world around him will increase to such an extent that he will, thereby, have unassailable confirmation of fundamental truths: the scientific learning which will, become available to man will fully substantiate the teachings of the Quran and of the Prophet of God.

It was this very point which God's Prophet made when he recounted the allegory of the fall of a great city.* He began by asking his followers if they had heard of the city which faced inland on one side and towards the sea on the other. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, he went on: "The Last Day will not come until an onslaught has been launched on this city by 70,000 of the sons of Isaac. On reaching the city, this army will alight, but they will not fight with weapons, nor will they shoot any arrows. They will say: 'There is no God besides Allah. Allah is great,' upon which the city will fall to them on one of its flanks." Their utterance of these words a second time will mark the capitulation of its second flank and when they pronounce them a third time, the doors of the city will be opened to them and they will enter it and partake of its bounty. They will be distributing the spoils among themselves when a cry will be raised: 'The Anti-Christ (*Dajjal*) has come forth.' On hearing this, they will leave everything and retrace their steps."

In essence, what this hadith has to tell us is that a time will come when victory will be gained on the mere utterance of the words: "*la ilaha illa llahu Allahu akbar*". In other words, the power of Islam which will conquer other nations will not be military, it will be ideological. According to the Prophet, the form of campaign – '*ghazwah* – which would subsequently bring the Muslims their greatest triumphs would in effect eschew fighting in favour of the communication of ideas.

* Taken from a *Hadith* reported by Abu Hurayrah and transmitted by Imam Muslim.

¹ The word *ghazwah*, which is normally used in a military sense, may also be used for a purely ideological campaign.

4 November 1988

Da'i and Mad'u

Michael Faraday and Lawrence Bragg, both of whom delivered lectures at the London's Royal Institute, were two of the most successful speakers of modern times.

What is the secret of a successful lecture? We give below the words of wisdom on this subject which we have gleaned from the respective memoirs of Faraday and Bragg.

"I am sorry to say that the generality of mankind cannot accompany us one short hour, unless the path is strewn with flowers."

"The essential feature for success of the lecture is the emotional contact between the lecturer and the students."

What Faraday and Bragg have written about becoming a successful lecturer applies with even greater pertinence to becoming a successful *da'i*,* or caller to the path of God.

A good relationship between *da'i* and *mad'u* (congregation) is essential, but it cannot be properly established unless the delicacy of its nature is first given due recognition. If the *mad'u* is to be carried along with the *da'i* the path shall have, first of all, to be "strewn with flowers". The *da'i* cannot expect his *mad'u* to stay by his side if he places thorns and stones in the way. Dry sermons attract no hearers, so that if a speaker is to be really effective, he should not only compel the attention of his hearers by the engaging quality of his discourse, but must establish a strong emotional rapport with them at the very outset.

**da'i*: The one who calls, *mad'u*: The one invited.

Journey Through the Dark

Arthur Koestler, the famous British writer and thinker, committed suicide along with his wife, Cynthia, in his London home in March, 1983. At the time of his death, he was 77 years of age.

Why should a man who had everything that one could wish for in this world commit suicide? He had won renown as a scholar and writer, and had acquired sufficient wealth to leave £400,000 to a British University for research in parapsychology.

The reason for his suicide was his overwhelming sense of horror and frustration at the evil being perpetrated in the world all around him—feelings which were reflected in the many books he wrote. In his famous *Darkness at Noon*, (published in 32 languages) he excoriates the so-called 'people's system of the Soviet Union, which perpetuates all the cruelty and exploitation which it was supposed to eradicate.

In a collection of his discourses published in 1974, he puts his finger on the crux of the matter: "There is a striking, symptomatic disparity between the growth curves of technological achievement on the one hand and of ethical behaviour on the other." He subsequently expresses his disillusionment with modern civilization when he writes: 'We can control the motions of the satellites orbiting distant planets, but we cannot control the situation in Northern Ireland."

Fatal Disequilibrium

Animals do not kill members of their own species. But man kills his own kind. After weighing up all sides of this question, Arthur Koestler came to the conclusion that in different parts of the human mind, an imbalance had occurred during the process of evolution. It was this imbalance which explained man's killing of man on a stupendous scale.

These researches, however, did not bring him any peace. His final Philosophy was that the best thing for man in modern circumstances was to commit suicide: "Death could be a welcome and natural relief for someone whose only alternative was pain and suffering." (*The Guardian*, London, March, 13, 1983)

Applying this theory to his own life, Arthur Koestler separated himself from a world which was not of his own making and which he did not have the power to change. He saw that man opened his eyes in a world of brightness only to enter the dark realms of death. He saw that despite extraordinary progress in technology, the moral progress of mankind was still to be attained. Man could control satellites, but man could not control man. Animals never killed their own species but human beings were eternally plotting the death of their fellow-men. He could see that man planned to reform defective systems of living by

making the optional use of human and physical resources, communism being one such attempt, but such 'reforms' had proved abortive, bringing more darkness than light to the human situation. Frustrated beyond measure by these glaring defects in human existences, Koestler committed suicide.

Life cannot but appear meaningless to a man who has no conception of the Afterlife, for the significance of the present world can be understood only in the context of our present life being followed by the Hereafter. Unless this notion is ever-present in the human consciousness, a descent into negativism is inevitable. In the face of an inexplicably hostile world, it is not surprising that the more sensitive souls feel themselves pushed irrevocably towards suicide.

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True faith brings visions of unseen realities:

Malik ibn Anas tells of how Muadh ibn Jabal came before the Prophet and was asked by him, "How is your morning?" "Full of faith in God," replied Muadh. "Every statement applies to something in particular, just as every statement has an inner meaning. To what does your present statement apply?" asked the Prophet. Muadh then told the Prophet that he had never woken up in the morning thinking that he would live till the evening, and never gone to rest in the evening thinking that he would live till morning; nor did he even take one step without the thought crossing his mind that he might not be able to take another. "It is as though I see all those communities, down on their knees, being called to account for their actions. Along with them are their prophets, and their idols, too, – those to which they used to appeal, as well as to God. It is as if I see, with my very own eyes, how the people in Hell are being punished and the people in Paradise are being rewarded." "You have attained true realization," the Prophet told him. "Now let there be no falling away from it."

(Hilyat al-Auliya)

Suppression of Evidence

It must never be forgotten that God's representative on earth is truth. Those who fail to support truth fail to support God Himself. Those who neglect God will, in turn, be neglected by God.

In ancient Arabia, there were a great number of Jews who, because of their glorious traditions, were accorded an honourable position in society. When the prophet Mohammad began to preach the message of Islam as revealed to him in the Quran, these Jews turned against him, making out that theirs was the true religion, and that Mohammad had strayed far from the true path of God. The reason for their opposition was simple. The religion of the Jews had been reduced to a cultural tradition handed down to them by their forefathers, and could not, therefore, countenance a faith which was in original state. It is a universally accepted fact that the followers of an adulterated religion can never bring themselves to tolerate the pure message of divine revelation, hence the hostility of the Jews towards the Prophet.

Nevertheless, this public display of disapproval masked very different feelings. In their heart of hearts, the Jews knew full well that it was not their forefathers but God who was Lord of the Universe. They likewise knew that the path of true religion brought one closer, not to one's ancestors but to the Almighty. The Jews did, indeed, appreciate the truth of the Prophet's message, but selfish considerations prevented them from making a public avowal of it. This deliberate act of concealment of what they knew in their hearts to be true is mentioned in the Quran which asks: "Who is more unjust than one who hides a testimony which he has received from God?" (2:140).

To be fundamentally convinced of a certain truth means that it is supported by God's own testimony. When God entrusts His servants with such evidence, it is incumbent upon them to proclaim it publicly. Those who conceal it are unjust and guilty in the sight of their maker, for they have shown themselves indifferent to the truth itself. God will, in consequence, adopt an indifferent attitude towards them, leaving them with no refuge in the heavens or on the earth.

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A Share of this World for the Next

The story of Qarun (Korah) as told in the Quran (28:77) lays stress on his having accumulated so much wealth that the keys of his treasures "would have weighed down a band of sturdy men". Seeing that his wealth had made Qaran arrogant and conceited, some of his kinsfolk advised him not to revel in it, but to "seek with that which God has bestowed on you, to attain the Paradise to come. Do not forget your share in this world."

According to commentators of the Quran, this last statement means that a believer should use the blessings of this world as a means of obtaining the rewards of the next world. Comments Imam Nasfi: "Such is a believer's share in this world." According to Mujahid and Ibn Zayd, one should not forget to extract from this world that which will increase one's share in the next world, for a believer's real share in this world is his investments in work for the next world, our present existence being but a planting-ground for the Hereafter. Imam Sady defines a "share in this world" as charity, and the consolidation of the ties of kinship. The Prophet's cousin, Ali, for his part, says that one should use one's health, strength, youth and wealth in order to seek the reward of the Hereafter. There is also a much-quoted saying of the Prophet himself that there are five things which one should make the most of – life, health, leisure, youth, and wealth – before they are nullified by death, ill-health, overwork, old age and impoverishment. Hasan Basri takes this verse to mean that one should keep whatever wealth one needs for one's worldly requirements, while anything in excess of this should be used to enhance one's prospects in the next world.

These assertions show that man has been put in this world in order to strive towards the next. Whoever conducts himself in this world in such a way as to profit in the Hereafter makes use of blessings which are purely ephemeral in nature in order to gain a portion of a life which will be truly everlasting. Those who act solely with worldly interests in mind, will, on the contrary, earn no such share in the life-everlasting, for they will have frittered away all their 'capital in this life. When they reach the world of the Hereafter, they will have nothing whatsoever to fall back on.

This does not apply only to the very ordinary people of this world, it applies to people in all walks of life, and should be particularly noted by those who seem to be engaged in pious works, but who are actually motivated by a lust for worldly things. If, in engaging in religious work, one is, in reality, in hot pursuit of wealth, fame, power, prestige or status, one cannot extract a share of life-everlasting from this world of ephemeral. Such hypocrites will find themselves just as destitute in the Hereafter as the least pretentious of human beings, indeed, their destitution will be even greater.

Acknowledgement of Truth

When the truth is rejected, it is generally because of arrogance, prejudice or ignorance. Those who have too great a sense of their own superiority to accept the truth when it is pointed out to them are not ever likely to see the light, for arrogance is generally so ingrained a trait that it remains obdurate in the face of even the most subtle of persuasion.

With the establishment of Islamic supremacy throughout Arabia – the majority of the Arab tribes having entered the fold of Islam after the conquest of Mecca – the Prophet Mohammad began a campaign aimed at destroying the idols which polytheists had erected at various places. He assigned to his Companion, Amr ibn al-Aas, the task of destroying one such idol, known as Suwa, which had been set up in the Time of Ignorance by Hauzaye of the Bani Mudhir in Riyat (now known as Yembo), a town located some three miles out of Mecca.

When Amr ibn al-Aas reached Yembo, he found his way barred by the shrine-keeper, who demanded to know his purpose in coming there. Amr replied that he had come to carry out the orders of the Prophet, namely to destroy the idol which had been erected there. The shrine-keeper was so deeply convinced of Suwa's greatness and inviolability that he scoffed at the mere suggestion that the Prophet's Companion could destroy it. "Suwa will prevent you from doing so!" he exclaimed. "I pity you," replied Amr. "Even now you are in the grip of this superstition! Can this piece of stone see and hear? How is it going to stop me from destroying it? And so saying, he dealt the idol a sharp blow, whereupon it simply fell to pieces.

This was not at all what the shrine-keeper had expected, and, with the shattering of the idol, his own beliefs also crumbled to nothing. He promptly denounced his former polytheistic faith in favour of the religion of *tawheed* (monotheism), and there and then, in the presence of Amr, he made his avowal of faith: "I have submitted to Allah!"

When the truth is rejected, it is generally because of arrogance, prejudice or ignorance. Those who have too great a sense of their own superiority to accept the truth when it is pointed out to them are not ever likely to see the light, for arrogance is generally so ingrained a trait that it remains obdurate in the face of even the most subtle of persuasion. Minds which are biased or ignorant, however, can generally be won over by presenting the truth in favourable circumstances and with the right degree of persistence. It is true that we cannot all be like Amr, – smashing idols to convince the unbelievers, – but we can cite his example and find many more illustrations from the Quran and *Hadith* to reinforce our arguments. It is the duty of the Muslims of today, just as it was in the time of the Prophet, to fill in those gaps in understanding which obscure and negate God's truth.

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God the Greatest

To discover God is to arrive at the greatest of realities, for the discovery of our Creator is such as to shake a man's life to its very foundations. It is comparable to bathing in an indescribably beautiful, divine light from which one emerges revivified, seeing God with one's own eyes, even before He has chosen to reveal Himself.

Perverseness Taken to Extremes

The Prophet Mohammad was asked by some of those who heard his teachings to produce a "sign" (ayah). The Quran's rejoinder to this demand was: "have they not been given sufficient proof (bayyinah) in previous Books?" (Quran, 20:133-35). 'Bayyinah' was verbal proof, found in previous scriptures of his claim to prophethood, but such verbal proof is always open to various interpretations, and as such, can frequently be explained away. For this reason the Prophet was asked for a tangible miracle. So that there should be no grounds for denial.

The Quran points out that the real problem is not the absence of a sign, but the questioner's unenlightened state. It is only those who are serious in their quest for truth who can appreciate what is meant by proof. Superficiality and egocentrism are great barriers to attainment of the truth. Shallow thinkers cannot seriously apply their minds to matters of truth and falsehood, neither then can they appreciate the weight of evidence in support of truth. They may be presented with any number of clear proofs, but, either they cannot or will not recognize them as such, and are wont to protest that no proof has been placed before them.

Such is human intransigence when faced with the truth. But a day will come when they are forced to accept it. They will have no choice but to do so on the day that mankind is raised from the dead. But truth acknowledged in this way, as a result of coercion, is of no benefit, and will serve rather to prove humans guilt. This will be the time when one is made to bear the consequences of one's deeds. It will be too late for atonement.

It is unfortunate that those who attempt to bring the message of truth are often thwarted by their listeners turning a deaf ear to them, or engaging them in meaningless, irrelevant discussions. The very same 'listeners' will even complain that no messenger has ever brought them the truth. When taken to task for never having attempted to seek out the truth themselves, they will always be ready with some pretext for not having done so.

Earnest messengers may do their utmost to convey the truth, but whether or not that truth is accepted, will, in the last analysis, depend upon the mentality of their listeners. Only if the latter are serious in their search for the truth will they recognize it, and be guided by it; if not, they are bound to go astray.

The So-Called Standard-Bearers of Islam

In sharp contrast are today's so-called standard-bearers of Islam who listen with positive glee when their rivals are subjected to scurrilous abuse. How ironic it is that these self-styled custodians of Islam should fall so short – in terms of character – of the standards set, not by the adherents of Islam, but by the unbelievers.

In the year 6 AH, the Prophet Mohammad signed the peace-treaty of Hudaybiyyah. Later in the same year, the Prophet sent letters to rulers and kings on the periphery of the Arabian peninsula, inviting them to accept Islam. One such letter was sent through Dyahyah Kalbi to the Roman Caesar, Heraclius, a Christian of keen intellect and realistic disposition.

Heraclius was in Palestine when he received this letter. Seeing that Arabs were frequent visitors to this region, the Caesar decided to summon some compatriots of the Prophet, in order to find out from them more about this affair. One of those summoned was Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, an inveterate opponent of the prophet, speaking through an interpreter, Hercalius asked him some questions, relating directly to the prophet Mohammad: "Tell me about him," said Heraclius. "He is a sorcerer and a liar, certainly no prophet," replied Abu Sufyan. "I did not mean that you should heap abuse on him," Heraclius rebuked Abu Sufyan. "Rather, I would like to know what his standing is amongst you. Is he a man of intelligence and sound opinion?"

Heraclius was a *Kafir*, i.e. one who rejected the message of Islam and died an unbeliever. Nevertheless, his character was such that he was not interested in hearing even a potential rival vilified. On the contrary, he was displeased when Abu Sufyan spoke of the Prophet in a derogatory manner. What did interest him was the family background of the Prophet, and whether he was a man of noble standing, sound intellect and integrity.

In sharp contrast are today's so-called standard-bearers of Islam who listen with positive glee when their rivals are subjected to scurrilous abuse. How ironic it is that these self-styled custodians of Islam should fall so far short – in terms of character – of the standards set, not by the adherents of Islam, but by the unbelievers.

On Trial

In this world, the truth is to be discovered only in the realms of the “unseen”. Those who expect to find the truth on the level of the “seen” will never succeed in finding it.

At the Battle of Uhud (3 AH) the Muslims suffered severe losses, seventy of the army of the faithful having been martyred. The prophet himself was amongst the seriously wounded. These events, naturally, were a source of great distress to the Muslims of Medina, but the Quran explains the outcome of the Battle of Uhud in the following terms: “The misfortune which befell you when the two armies met was ordained by God, so that He might know the true believers and the hypocrites....” (3:166-67).

Such are ways of the Almighty, this divine method of trial being mentioned at various points in the Quran. The wording differs, but the message remains the same. For instance, in the *surah* entitled “Iron”, Muslims are told that any misfortune which befalls them in the world, irrespective of the form it takes, “is recorded in a Book before We bring it into being” (57:22). Later in the same *surah*, it is explained that such material resources as iron exist “so that God may know those who support Him, though unseen, and support His Apostles” (57:25).

The Battle of Uhud, was to be explicit, a divine test of this nature meant to separate the weak in faith from the strong, for there existed at that time in Medina many who were not fully convinced of unseen realities. It was only the strong in faith for whom truth was a matter of conviction, and their faith, therefore remained unaffected by the vicissitudes of defeat.

Those who were weak in faith, on the other hand, assessed the situation on a purely superficial level, in the sense that the defeat at Uhud made them look with scorn upon deeply religious Muslims. They even began to harbour doubts about the genuineness of the Prophet and the veracity of his message. This attitude exposed them as friends of fortune rather than adherents of the truth. So long as they remained on the winning side, they were willing to espouse the cause of truth, but the moment they met with misfortune, they shied away from it.

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The Wrong Reaction

Our present-day "Muslim crusaders" are no different in their reactions. It has been hate, not love, which has spurred them into action. Their efforts have been aimed solely at consigning people to Hell-fire. As for making them eligible for the Garden of Paradise they have taken no action whatsoever; they do not genuinely feel that this is their concern.

Saeed Naurasi (1873-1920), a Turkish scholar and warrior in the cause of Islam, was a man of great mental and practical abilities whose persistent and vehement opposition to the Turkish government turned the authorities against him. Eventually, he was arrested and brought before a military tribunal. Delivering a statement in court he said: "Even if I possessed a thousand souls, I would not hesitate to sacrifice every one of them for the sake of just one single point of the true teachings of Islam". (*Dawat al-Haq*, Rabat, November, 1985)

Throughout his life, Saeed Naurasi had been absorbed mainly in his studies. But then, one day, something happened which changed the entire course of his life. From being a student of Islam, he turned into a warrior for Islam. It was in 1894 that he read in certain local newspapers that the British Colonial Minister, Gladstone, had delivered a speech in the House of Commons, which was clearly inimical to the interests of Islam. Holding a copy of the Quran in his hand, Gladstone told the House: "So long as the Muslims hold this Quran in their hands, we will not be able to rule over them. This being the case, we have no choice but to eliminate it completely, thus severing the Muslims' connection with it."

On reading this, Saeed Naurasi should have been filled with the urge to correct the erroneous way of thinking into which Gladstone and men of his like had fallen, but instead, he became preoccupied with the irreverence which Gladstone had shown towards the Quran. He was moved by a desire, not to show Gladstone the true way, but to punish him for his act of blasphemy. Today, the reaction of our prominent Muslim figures is very similar. There is no positive approach in their espousal of the Islamic cause. Whenever they take up the Islamic banner against alleged transgressors, they are invariably moved to this by some negative reaction.

But Islam, far from being an expression of negative reactions, is a faith grounded in positive realities. A true believer is one who discovers God in all His greatness, and devotes his life to God alone. Reading the signs of God throughout the length and breadth of the universe, he becomes a fountainhead of divine learning. It is as though he has penetrated the veil over the unseen, and has seen Heaven and Hell with his own eyes. His greatest yearning is to be saved from Hellfire and admitted into the gardens of everlasting delight. It is when such a state of realization has been attained that one can truly call oneself a believer and a Muslim. Ultimately, this state of realisation is communicated to others, as one calls them to the path of true faith.

In his statement in court, Saeed Naurasi declared himself ready to sacrifice his entire being for anyone point of the true teachings of Islam. At first sight, this statement would appear to span the entire spectrum of Islamic teachings. On closer scrutiny, however, the fact emerges that he had only a small part of Islam in mind. This is illustrated by his reaction to Gladstone's statement on the Quran. While concentrating on the fact that Gladstone's suggestion was an act of irreverence towards the Quran, he completely disregarded the clear implication that, if Gladstone could make such a statement, it was because the message of the Quran had never been effectively conveyed to him. Saeed Naurasi was highly incensed on the first score, and felt moved to take punitive action. But on the second score, he remained impassive.

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Before the Victory

The greatness of the Companions was in no way mystical in origin. It was simply that they believed in the Prophet and made sacrifices in the path of their faith before his prophethood had been set with the seal of universal credence.

Prior to the establishment of his moral supremacy, the status of a prophet in the eyes of the world is no higher, or no lower, than that of any other, ordinary human being. At a time when his prophethood has not become public, or still awaits establishment as an authentic, historical fact, the only ones who are able to recognise him as a prophet, and make sacrifices on his behalf, are those who immediately grasp the essence of his message. It requires rare courage to follow a prophet at such a time, amounting, as it so often does, to degrading oneself in the eyes of society, and making sacrifices for which one receives no credit.

In the chapter of the Quran named after the Prophet Hud, it is mentioned that those who were sceptical of the Prophet justified their disbelief by saying that they did not see anything special about the Prophet. The Prophet's rejoinder to this was to point to the clear proofs with which he had been sent. This exchange shows that if people were reluctant to accept the message of the prophets, it was because their observation of them was superficial: they expected them to bask in an aura of worldly grandeur, and, when they did not, they felt too disappointed to examine the rational proofs, which were, in fact, the greatest things which the prophets had to offer them.

The Companions of the Prophet were men of great perception who recognized the Prophet when there was nothing besides abstract proofs to confirm the truth of his message. It is this quality which makes them so unique in the annals of human history. According to a certain Hadith, the Prophet said: "Do not malign my Companions, for were anyone of you to spend in charity the equivalent of Mount Uhud in gold, this would not equal just half that amount spent by one of them.

The greatness of the Companions was in no way mystical in origin. Nor did their deeds excel those of others because they were carried out in an ambience of sanctity. It was simply that they believed in the Prophet and made sacrifices in the path of their faith before his prophethood had been set with the seal of universal credence. They gave of their wealth before the victory and took part in the fighting" thus receiving "greater honour than others who gave and fought thereafter." (Quran, 57:10)

Getting to the Root of the Problem

In the days before the Prophet received his first revelation, and had not yet launched himself upon his prophetic mission, he was invited to attend a gathering at the house of Abd Allah ibn Judaan in his home town of Mecca. There the assembled citizens entered into an agreement – **hilf al-fudhool* – that they would come to the aid of the oppressed and would secure for people any rights which they had been denied. Later, after he had begun his prophetic mission, when the subject of *hilf al-fudhool* was mentioned, the Prophet said, “Even now, as a Muslim, if I were invited to attend such a meeting, I would accept.”

As far as matters such as *hilf al-fudhool* were concerned, the Prophet was content to be an invitee. But where the central point of his mission was concerned – *tawheed* or the oneness of God – it was he who did the inviting. “This is my path. I invite unto Allah, I and all my followers.” (Quran, 12:108)

In a situation where polytheism predominates, the basic duty of a Muslim is of course, to follow the Prophet’s example, and invite people to accept the oneness of God. As far as social harmony and moral rectitude are concerned, however, a Muslim may accept the invitation of any well-intentioned group and co-operate with them in eradicating the ills of society. Such work, however, should not divert him from, or replace his essential mission, which is to call people to God: all social ills can, after all, be traced to one fundamental cause – people’s neglect of their Maker. If people forget their social responsibilities, it is because they forget God. It is, therefore, for a Muslim, first and foremost, to work on the root-cause of social malaise rather than to concentrate on removing mere off-shoots.

* This event is mentioned in various biographies of the Prophet.

Unfair Distribution

Though the idolators of Mecca claimed that they believed in God, it was, in fact, their idols to which they gave pride of place. Their undue attachment to them became evident when it came to allotting to both God and their idols shares in the produce of their land and cattle.

"They set aside for God a share of their produce and of their cattle, saying: 'This is for Allah' – so they pretend – 'and this for our idols'. Their idols' share never reaches God, but the share of God is wholly given to their idols. How ill they judge." (Quran, 6:136).

If for some reason a greater amount was allotted to God than to the idols, they transferred the excess amount to the idols' share. If the reverse occurred, with the idols receiving a greater share than God, they did not then subtract the excess amount from it and add it to God's share, but were content to leave matters as they stood. Their claim to belief in God was, in effect, false, for the moment there was any clash of interests, beings and things other than God came uppermost in their minds and were therefore given priority.

It was not only the Arabian idolators who acted in this manner. Indeed, everyone is faced with the same choice. The only difference is that, whereas in ancient times, the followers of polytheistic religions made their idols out of pieces of stone, nowadays people make their idols out of objects, ideas, and other people. This is what makes it easy for them to throw moral standards to the winds in order to pursue their own selfish interests. Whenever it comes to making a choice between honesty and worldly interests, they allocate their allegiance in the same ill-judged manner as the idolators of old. They do not fear the consequences of misappropriating what should be God's by right, and are obsessed instead with the outcome of neglecting the other objects, ideas or people which they have set up, idol-fashion, in His place.

The Fragmentation of the Muslim Community

There is a Hadith in which the Prophet Mohammad is reported to have said: "The Jews became divided into seventy one sects, while the Christians split up into seventy two. The number of groups into which my community will be divided is seventy three.

Although the authenticity of this particular tradition has been challenged by *Hadith* scholars, the details given by a number of other, similar traditions would appear to support it. There can be little doubt, therefore, on the point the Prophet wanted to make about the fragmentation of the Muslim community. His pessimism about the unity of his followers was, of course, expressed in the form of an epigram, but it is remarkable how many scholars have taken the number 'seventy three' in the purely literal sense of a specific numerical entity. So literal-minded have they been that they have listed the different splinter groups and tried to make them add up to seventy three. In his book, *A-Milal wa'al Nehal*, Ibn Hazm has put the actual number of Muslim sects at 76, while Al-Ashari gives us the round figure of one hundred. Al-Khwarizmi, however, makes it a mere 72. They do not see that efforts to pinpoint exact figures are wasted, when what the *Hadith* is all about is the keen sorrow we should feel – just like the Prophet – that fragmentation should take place at all. When the Prophet used the number seventy three it was to express his regret that Muslims would become even worse than the Jews and Christians in their state of disunity. Rather than count the number of different sects, we would do better to concentrate on ascertaining the cause of this trend towards sectarianism.

This was a matter pondered over and discussed in great depth by the Companions of the Prophet, not the least of the debaters being Umar ibn Khattab, who wondered how it was that when they all followed the one Prophet, the Muslims would ultimately fall into a state of disunity. Putting this question to Abd Allah ibn Abbas he asked him how it was that when this community has one and the same Prophet, all of its members prayed towards the same *qiblah* and possessed just one Scripture, it would split up into different factions. Abd Allah explained this paradox as follows: "Commander of the Faithful, the Quran has been revealed to us, and we therefore understand its context. But the nations who come after us will read the Quran without knowing the context of its revelations. Each community will then form its own opinions, which clash with those of other communities. This will result in open conflict, and they will begin fighting with one another". Initially, both Umar and Ali disagreed with what Ibn Abbas had said, and they remonstrated with him, but after Umar had given fuller consideration to his words, he realized that there was some truth in them. He then called for Ibn Abbas, and asked him to repeat his explanation, to which he then gave his approval.

Ibn Abbas' statement implies that there are two levels of appreciation of the Quran, depending upon whether it is read with, or without true understanding. The man who brings knowledge and

understanding to his reading of the Quran will be enlightened and uplifted by it, whereas the ignorant reader will be left untouched by its greatness. It is individuals of the latter type who will be responsible for the fragmentation of the Muslim community.

20 November 1988

They will be of good cheer on meeting God:

While still a young man, Talha ibn Bara' came to the Prophet to swear allegiance to him and to accept Islam. "I am at your behest," he vowed to the Prophet. "I will do exactly as you command." "Even if I tell you to sever your relations with your parents?" the Prophet asked. (Talha used to look after his mother with great affection). Talha ibn Bara' at once prepared himself to carry out the Prophet's command. 'Talha,' the Prophet said to him, "Our religion does not teach one to sever ties. I just wanted you to be absolutely certain of your faith."

Talha ibn Bara' came within the fold of Islam and remained a fine Muslim till the day he died. When he was suffering his final illness, the Prophet came to visit him and found him in a state of unconsciousness. "I think that Talha's soul will be taken up tonight," he said. He departed then, asking to be informed when Talha regained consciousness. It was midnight before he did so, and he said that the Prophet should not be disturbed at that late hour. "He might be bitten by some harmful creature or some Jewish enemy might do him an injury if he comes out at night," he protested. Talha passed away that very night and the Prophet was not informed until after the morning prayer. "Lord, may be of good cheer on meeting you and you on meeting Him," the Prophet prayed.

(Tabarani)

Having All, But Feeling Deprived

It was said that he had "brought more joy and more laughter to more people than anyone who ever lived." But, in his old age, he himself stopped smiling, for as his age increased, so did his infirmities. His sight, speech and hearing began to fall and he was confined to a wheelchair. While the Chaplin of the screen continued to be an object of entertainment to cinema audiences, the real Chaplin lay in bed, unable to work any longer. He died a few hours before his family's traditional Christmas celebration was about to begin.

Charlie Chaplin, who used to play the part of a clown in films, was one of America's first film-star millionaires, having earned huge amounts of money during his 52-year film career. Born in London in 1889, he worked in films in America, ultimately making his home in a villa on a 37-acre estate overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland. When he died in 1977, aged 88 he was worth £10 million. After early successes, he was showered with laurels, including a knighthood in 1975. In 1972, he made a triumphant return to Hollywood to receive a special Oscar for "The incalculable effect he had had in making motion pictures the art form of this century."

There is no part of the globe where he has not been appreciated, and his 80 films are still being shown continuously. Even his first comedies of the 1914 -17 period are still exhibited commercially, not as museum pieces, but as modern entertainment – the only motion pictures of that period still to be so exhibited. It is estimated that 300 million people have seen each Chaplin comedy.

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Dennis Gifford, one of Chaplin's biographers, writes, "While he was working, he was creating something more than mere films; he was creating life as he wanted it to be. Life with laughter and love, dreams and hope, poverty and cruelty, but where there was always a happy ending, if nothing more than a walk down the road to tomorrow."

Another commentator, writing after Chaplin's death, says, "Chaplin's life has been filled to the brim with what most lives consist of yearning after... wealth and fame and creative play and beautiful women... but he does not know how to enjoy any of the four."

This was certainly true of his most intimate relationships, he married four times, but was perhaps only happy in his last marriage. Then, although extremely rich, he was still dogged by the fear that he might once again become as desperately poor as he had been in his childhood.

The story of Charlie Chaplin is the story of all men, in the sense that happiness eludes them whether, like Charlie, they have everything, but cannot enjoy it, or whether they are so lacking in resources that a sense of deprivation mars their entire existence. The truth is that in this world those who are showered with blessings can be just as unhappy as those who are deprived of them. But there are very few who can grasp this reality.

The futility of endlessly pursuing happiness is illustrated by the suicide note of a young American woman: "I wanted to find happiness and so I took to intoxicants. I even went to the extent of having free sex. But I did not find happiness anywhere. Now, frustrated, I end my life."

Many liberated men and women stop at nothing in the quest for happiness. But they finally learn that happiness is not attainable in the way they have chosen to seek it. After leading lives of utter frustration, many feel driven to commit suicide in sheer desperation.

How ignorant are they who lay claim to knowledge. What failures are they who top the lists of the world's most successful men.

Death Spares No One

When a man is at the very zenith of his progress, death stops him short, as if it were negating the very efforts which had carried him towards success.

Mr. J.A. Deo, an I.A.S. officer who was formerly Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Defence, entered the Indian Administrative Service, the most prestigious of the country's service, after acquitting himself well in his studies, both in India and abroad. Born in Simla in 1923, he would have expected to retire in 1981 when he was at the peak of his career. But barely a year after his promotion to the post of Secretary Defence, he expired on April 10, 1980, at the comparatively young age of 57. He was cremated at Nigam Bodh Ghat, with the three Chiefs of Staff of the Indian armed forces in attendance to pay him homage. How ironic that the senior most officers of India's land, sea and air forces, invested as they are with full powers to inflict a crushing defeat upon any enemy who dares assail this country with its 60 crore population, were helpless when it came to saving Sri Deo from the jaws of death.

Another even more prominent figure who was snatched away by death, while he was still in his prime, was Sanjay Gandhi, the younger son of the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In the 1980 elections of the central parliament and state assemblies, their party had had an extraordinary success, and it was widely accepted at that time that Sanjay Gandhi would eventually succeed his mother as Prime Minister. But, on the very brink of assuming this high office, when he was still just 33, he met his end in the most sudden and drastic of ways. On the morning of June 23, 1980, he had wanted to have a joy ride in a new two seater American aircraft, and taking a Captain Saxena along with him, he took off from Safdarjung airport in New Delhi. The aircraft was only a short distance from the runway when, due to a sudden engine failure, it went out of control and crashed. Both Sanjay Gandhi and his unfortunate passenger, Captain Saxena, were killed instantaneously, and when their bodies were recovered from the debris, they were found to be in a severely mutilated condition.

Just one day before this fatal accident, when Sanjay Gandhi had been travelling in a car along with Delhi's Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Jag Mohan, he had exuded confidence when he said, "There is no need to worry, be it a car or an aeroplane, nothing can go wrong while I am at the wheel". He did not know that the events of the following morning would stifle that feeling of confidence forever. The Times of India of June 24, 1980, observed, in the context of the brightness of his prospects, "What an irony that he should die so soon."

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